

The lonely suicide of and family's anger at

IT WAS when Janet McQueen saw the boxes stacked up alongside furniture and bric-a-brac that the enormity of the loss finally hit her. There, at a storage warehouse, were two dozen boxes containing all that was left of the life of her brother, the acclaimed designer Alexander McQueen, who the family knew by his real name, Lee.

Since his death three years ago, the McQueen label has gone from strength to strength and is now seen on Sienna Miller, the Beckhams and countless more A-listers. His protégée Sarah Burton designed the Duchess of Cambridge's wedding dress.

Some of his designs are on display in the exhibition dedicated to his mentor, Isabella Blow, which opened this week at Somerset House in London.

But there was nothing fashionable about that dimly lit room in Bow where, more than a year after his death, Janet was finally allowed to rummage through a small proportion of the possessions



by Claudia Joseph

her wealthy brother had amassed. Most heart-breaking were the clothes, some moth-eaten after months in storage.

Janet, Lee's older sister, was driven to tears. 'I just got this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach,' she says. 'I had gone there on my own to get a little bit back of my brother but I ended feeling really upset and alone,' she says.

Today, Janet and her two brothers have decided to speak for the first time since his suicide on February 11, 2010, in part to pay tribute to the extraordinary creativity of Alexander McQueen and to ensure that it gets a fitting legacy.

But there is also a sense of anger from a family that feels excluded from their late brother's affairs – forced to wait

more than a year to see his possessions and, distressingly, not given the CBE he received in 2003. And they have emotionally charged questions for the trustees of his legacy and executors of his will.

What, they ask, has become of McQueen's £16 million fortune? Why are they in the dark about the activities of the multi-million pound trust fund he established?

Why (so far as they can tell) have there been no awards or grants made in his name – apart from one to the place that launched him, Newham College in East London – despite his wishes? Even this has been hampered by restrictions from Kering, the fashion company that owns his name.

'The executors may have behaved within the law but in our view they haven't behaved with any compassion,' says Janet.

HE added: 'We feel we have been treated like second-class citizens. They didn't let us see his house before it was dismantled or pack up my brother's personal things, which is an essential part of the grieving process, and they are not keeping us informed about his legacy.'

'I'm very sad that we have been excluded in this way. Lee was a very kind person and he would have been horrified that this is happening to us.'

Alexander McQueen had enjoyed a meteoric rise since 1992, when his entire student design collection was bought by fashion stylist Isabella Blow.

She became his muse and patron, even establishing a small studio for him – and her faith

Siblings of the genius designer reveal: We have been shut out by trustees and shocked by their secrecy

ALEX LENTATI / GRAHAM JEPSON / BBC / LES WILSON



proved well founded. His daring – sometimes outrageous – creations, including his low-cut 'bumster' trousers, made him British Designer of the Year four times and saw him named head designer at Givenchy. In fashion terms, he was a superstar.

With Blow's death in 2007, however, his world started to unravel. He was devastated by her suicide. Then his beloved mother Joyce fell seriously ill. By Christmas 2009, it was clear that she was dying.

All six of her children – Janet,

Tony, Michael, Tracy, Jackie and Lee – visited her in hospital, but Lee's state of mind meant he had to be persuaded to go.

'He fought against it because he was frightened,' says Janet, 'and didn't want to see her so ill. Eventually we persuaded him to come over but he really struggled. I think he knew it was the last time he would see her.' Joyce passed away on February 2, 2010.

Janet spoke to her brother twice again before he died nine days later but, to her lasting regret, did not realise how depressed

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Growing up with Lee, superstar

THE McQueens always knew there were two sides to their brother: the flamboyant figure known to the fashion cognoscenti and the man whom his three sisters and two brothers knew simply as 'Lee'.

Born on March 17, 1969, Lee Alexander McQueen was brought up in Stratford, East London, the youngest of six.

'Money was tight in those days,' says his brother Michael.

'When Dad was a lorry driver he would get up at 5am and arrive back at 9pm six days a week. Mum, a teacher, did all the accounts. He was quite draconian and she was far more liberal and creative. She would sit at the kitchen table doing watercolours and researching our family history.'

Michael recalls that the sisters were good swimmers, who competed for Essex. 'Mum used to go with them to every race.



IN DEMAND:

Lee with supermodels Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss

Lee joined the club but wanted to do synchronised swimming – I should have realised then that he was gay.'

Perhaps because of his sexuality, or his creative side, Lee was a vulnerable child and had a tough time at school and sometimes at home too.

'There was always an atmosphere when he and Dad were together,' continues Michael. 'Lee would be at home sewing and Dad would turn round and say, "Why don't you get yourself a proper job?"'

'But in later life they became very close and Dad was

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